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AUTHOR Arnold, Ellen; Czamanske, Jackie
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ABSTRACT

The metaphor of a family road trip is used to describe a 10-week seminar program at the Rochester Institute of Technology (New York) for learning disabled high school students and their parents in preparation for student transition to college. The small group format (maximum eight families) allows for both whole group and separate (parents and students) group activities. Self evaluation and metacognition are stressed throughout. Sessions focus on the following: orientation; self advocacy; admissions; student panel (current learning disabled college students share their experiences); problem solving; study skills; letting go; and evaluation. (DB)

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CAN I MAKE IT?
A TRANSITION PROGRAM FOR COLLEGE BOUND LEARNING DISABLED STUDENTS AND THEIR PARENTS

ED335836

by

Ellen Arnold
Training Specialist
Norman Howard School Demonstration Project
Rochester, New York 14618

and

Jackie Czamanske
LD Specialist
Rochester Institute of Technology
Rochester, New York 14623

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CAN I MAKE IT?

Twenty years ago the field of learning disabilities did not exist. Today, thousands of our youngsters are under this special education label (Gloeckler 1988). Ten years ago, an LD student in college was a rarity. Today, hundreds of such students are applying and attending our colleges (Scheiber and Talpers 1987). But throughout the high schools, parents and students are asking, "CAN I MAKE IT?"

Consider this typical scenario. George is a junior in high school. He has a C+ average, and school has always been a "drag". Years ago, his parents, concerned about his poor progress, pushed the school to "do something". He was tested, found to have a learning disability, and so now he is eligible for Resource Room support and some test modifications. He needs to use a word processor and spelling checker if anyone is going to be able to read his writing, and his notetaking skills are atrocious, but he is an excellent math student, and pretty good in art. George can't wait to get out of school. Lectures, textbooks and notetaking have not been rewarding processes for him. But what is he going to do? He doesn't want a 'dead end' job, but the thought of college (and more of the same lecture stuff) is repulsive. Yet, all his friends are planning to go on. But CAN HE MAKE IT?

Let's look at George's parents. They care a lot about their son. They have always been there to help him with his homework,

and support him when his frustrations have gotten out of hand. Dad taught him to use a word processor (after buying him a computer) and mom has spent many hours at the kitchen table helping him with writing papers. Both parents have had endless meetings with school people over the course of George's schooling. Classroom teachers, Committee on Special Education meetings, Special Education conferences; endless hours spent trying to help the school people understand that George really could do the work, if given the right set of circumstances. Mom feels like she could teach courses in advocacy. Dad wonders about George's ability to be independent, since he has needed so much support so far. But what happens next? Can George really function in a college atmosphere? What role should the parents take in the college selection and application process? Who will advocate for George once he gets there? Is it worth the time and the money? Or, if they let him go, are they setting him up for frustration and possible failure?

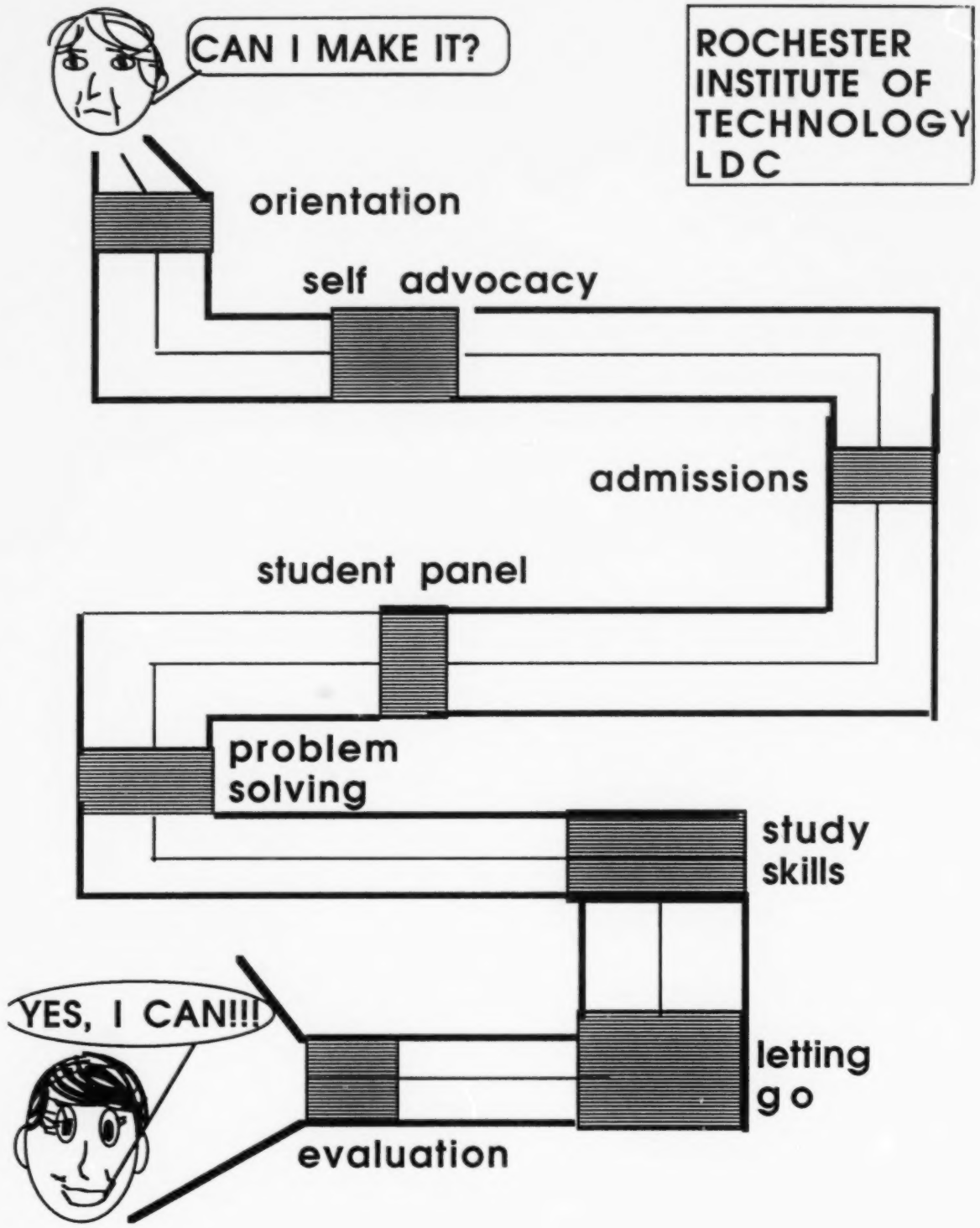
This scenario demonstrates the reasons for "CAN I MAKE IT?" a ten week seminar for LD students and their parents, offered through the Learning Development Center at Rochester Institute of Technology. A high school resource teacher joined forces with a college LD specialist to map out and co-teach a course to deal with the issues George's family raised (Arnold, 1991). Contacts with the local office of V.E.S.I.D. (Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities) provided a vehicle for registered families to receive tuition assistance.

With the decrease in the 18-22 year cohort, many colleges are 'scrambling' for students, and accepting LD students in record numbers. In some cases, support services are available, and in many others, the students need to work hard at developing their own support system once they get on campus. And yet the very skills that the students need (self advocacy) are rarely covered in any high school curriculum (Ness 1989). Too few of these students really understand their own learning style, or what types of accommodations might be necessary for them to be successful at the college level.

The relative newness of the LD student in college means that there are few EXPERTS in this field, yet at the same time most campuses fill out questionnaires reported in several college guides, stating that they do, in fact, have services for this population. The LD families need to be smart consumers, to know how to evaluate the institution and whether it really can meet their own personal needs. The parents have become masters at dealing with the public school system, but now the rules and the players have changed.

The topics covered in this ten week series can be seen in Figure 1, which provides a metaphor for the course. Each bridge to cross represents the knowledge and experiences necessary for success. The vehicles used during the sessions includes integrative learning, learning style, frames of intelligence, multi-modality learning, cooperative learning, role playing, simulations, graphic organizers, appropriate music and

FIGURE 1


CAN I MAKE IT?
ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY LDC
orientation
self advocacy
admissions
student panel
problem solving
study skills
letting go
evaluation
YES, I CAN!!!

ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
LEARNING DEVELOPMENT CENTER-RACQUET CLUB
1 LOMB MEMORIAL DRIVE
ROCHESTER, NY 14623-0887

CAN I MAKE IT? PROGRAM

Ellen Arnold
Norman Howard School
Demonstration Project
220 Idlewood Drive
Rochester, NY 14618
716-442-0160

Jackie Czamanske
LD Specialist-Special Services
Rochester Institute of Technology
1 Lomb Memorial Drive
Rochester, NY 14623-0887
716-475-2832

Resources

Arnold, Ellen "The Development of a Developmental Annotated Time Line For Learning Disabled High School Students. ERIC 232 685, May, 1991.

ASSPHEE-Association of Handicapped Student Servcice Programs in Postsecondary Education. P.O. Box 21192, Columbus, Ohio. 43221.

Gardner, Howard. Frames of Mind. Theory of Multiple Intelligences. Basic Books, 1983.

HEATH Resource Center (Higher Education and Adult Training for People with Handicaps), National Clearinghouse on Postsecondary Education for Individuals with Handicaps. Washington, D.C.

Hull House Revival: Songs of New Horizons by Dean Santos, Local Folkel Records, 104 Catalpa Road, Rochester, NY,1989.

LASSI(Learning and Study Strategies Inventory. H & H Publishing Company,1987.

Myers Briggs Type Indicator

Keirsley Temperament Sorter from Please Understand Me.

Unlocking Potential: College and Other Choices for Learning Disabled People-A Step-by-Step Guide by B. Scheiber and Talpers, Adler & Adler, 1987.

interactive games. The fuel that powers the program is the use of self-reflection and metacognition. Appropriate tune-ups are provided for students after they evaluate the skills they need to improve, or the topics they want to explore. Batteries are charged by the support the participants receive from each other.

But the really unique feature of this program, which brings students from a variety of high schools within a 100 mile radius of Rochester, New York, is the requirement that a student AND a parent attend. The parent and the student are each represented by a lane on our metaphorical road map because they both need travel the same road in order to get to their destination, even though they may travel the distance at different speeds and in different vehicles. This unusual format allows for a family trip, with separate stops for the adults when appropriate. Having two instructors allows flexibility to divide the group (maximum of 8 families) with an appropriate tour guide.

One thing learned from this exciting model is that parents appreciate THE FACTS that the students don't often hear. They want a "trip tic" while the students are still thinking about packing. The parents enjoy sharing experiences with other parents who feel equally lost. They need some perspective on their student-his strengths and weaknesses compared to other LD students! After having been integrally involved in their child's education on a daily basis, they need support in dealing with the highly complex interchanges of "letting go". They are unsure of direction, but they know where they want to head. Providing

parents with role playing situations and simulations (acted out with SOMEONE ELSE'S STUDENT), they are able to see their student through a clean windshield. Listening to another student share his learning strengths and weaknesses, and practice advocating for modifications gives the parents a new direction to see what a difficult road this is going to be for their student, and how they can help with the maintenance necessary to help their student develop those self advocacy skills while still in high school. Parents are tired of hearing all the things their students CAN'T do, and listening to a group of college LD students share their stories recharges their batteries, giving them renewed hope that success is possible, the destination reachable. Observing the students complete a course complete with tolls and barriers, gives parents a chance to stop, rest and reflect on their child's ability to take the wheel and pay the toll. This simulation reflects many of the junctions with which parents struggle, and provides insight into their own roadblocks.

The students often feel uncomfortable with having their parents on this trip. But once promised that they will have a chance to drive, and sometimes ride with their friends instead of their family, their concern diminishes. For some legs of the trip, the students car pool, to share their own personal experiences or goals. This enables them to obtain some perspective on how other LD students cope, and decreases the "aloneness" many of them feel. Student support for each other builds, particularly as they begin to travel to colleges and

share experiences of where they have been. During several sessions, the students park in a small circle, with parents as invisible members of an outer circle, with their radar turned on. Discussion revolves around concerns, self perceptions, reactions to activities. Some students have expressed delight in being able to say things that they always wanted their parents to hear, but never felt they had a green light to tell them directly.

Families attend a panel presented by current LD college students, who share their personal road maps. The students are given a front seat to view college life. They fill up with answers to "how long it takes to use texts on tape." Or "what route to take in order to obtain a proctor for a test if they modifications." They learn the importance of time management skills, since their trip may take longer than other students. But most importantly, they hear that if they carefully explore programs of interest, find avenues to enhance their own motivation, and drive down roads that use their learning strengths instead of their weaknesses, they can avoid many roadblocks and unnecessary detours.

In retrospect, the families complete their trip with a trunk full of positive memories, crossed bridges, experiences upon which to drive further on the road to education, and guide books that provide a basis for their planning their future travels. They discover that, "Yes, They Can" make it.

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